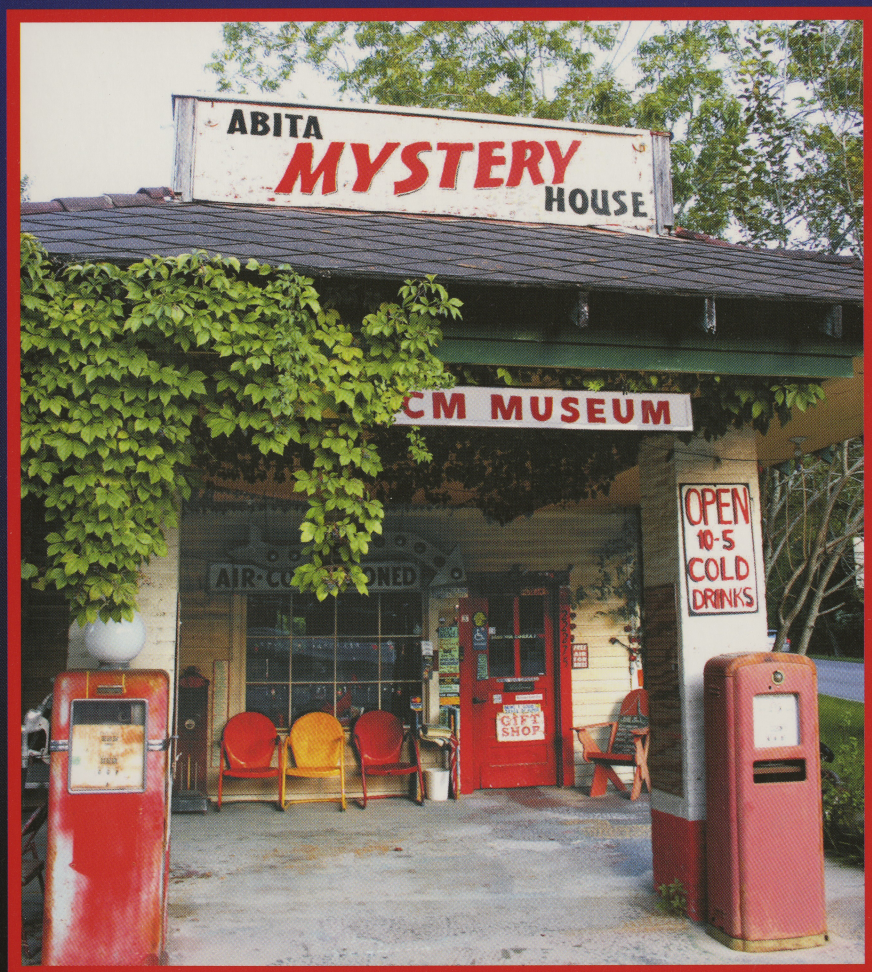


The Amazing Story of the Abita Mystery House



History



In 1995 my wife, Ann and I took our two sons Andrew and William to see Ross and Carla Ward's Tinkertown Museum in Albuquerque. In addition to being fun, my wife and I felt the Ward's deep commitment to a sense of aesthetics rarely found in any endeavor, much less a "roadside attraction." I met Ross Ward that day and, he generously showed me his private art studio with his canvases, drawings, and notebooks.

Before seeing Ward's Tinkertown, I didn't realize that people might be interested in seeing my own collections and inventions.



buildings. An old concrete stucco house that was on the museum grounds became the House of Shards with the help of over 15,000 ceramic and glass fragments. I landscaped the museum grounds with bamboo and vines. I constructed several aquariums, creating a home for native fish and turtles. I parked an old Airstream travel trailer-home that was attacked by a flying saucer. I also "caught" the

world's largest bassigator and "discovered" an abandoned gold mine. The museum is decorated with tens of thousands of bottles, bottle caps, license plates, springs, motors, old radios, wacky postcards, vintage bikes, Southern memorabilia, folk art, pocket combs, barbed wire, garden hoses, and old arcade machines.

My late wife, Ann O'Brien established a successful art jewelry studio in Abita Springs. The studio remains open – producing work from her original designs. Our gift shop has the jewelry for sale as well as other fine crafts and souvenirs.

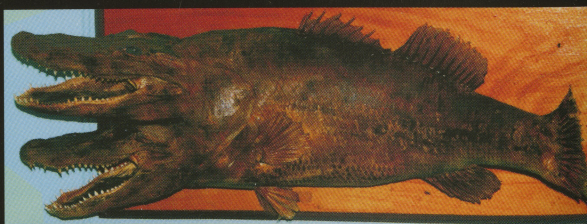
Ross had a saying "I did all this while you were watching TV." I appropriated this and now say "I did all this while you were on the internet."

Be Strange Not A Stranger,
~ John Preble



I soon found myself talking to Ross about my idea of creating a Southern version of Tinkertown.

Since that vacation, I put my energies and resources into creating the Abita Mystery House. I renovated an old service station, I moved a ninety year old Creole cottage to the museum grounds, I built a new exhibit hall, and I constructed some ancillary



IF YOU
HAVE
3 or more
IT'S A
COLLECTION

A MUSUEM HAS OVER
3 COLLECTIONS

HOSES.





Buford the Bassigator was built for two reasons: one, it is a Mardi Gras parade float; two, it is an exhibit at the Mystery House. The Preble family often participated in Mardi Gras winning costume and float design contests. Buford is our "jack-a-lope."

Preble enlisted Abita artist Dave Kelsey to helped catch (create) this 22 foot



Buford unpainted

bassigator. Many people think the eyes are bowling balls, but they are just inexpensive beach balls painted black.



The Main Exhibit Hall

Inside the Exhibit Hall are unusual collections and animated dioramas. The first thing that you notice when you step into the exhibit hall is the shrine to Elvis. The hall's main exhibit is River Road, a miniature scene thirty feet long. On the walls are collections of paint-by-number paintings, Southern memorabilia, roadside postcards,

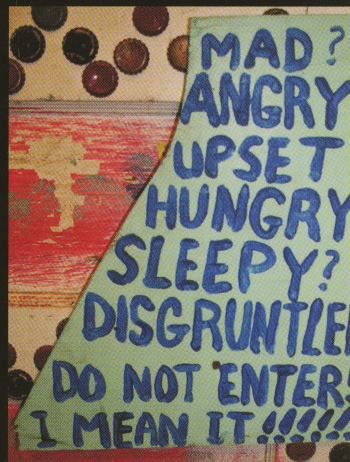
a display of pocket combs, antique radios, barbed wire, and arcade machines. Other miniature scenes you will see include: *New Orleans Jazz Funeral* and *The Tragedy on Dog Pound Road*. At the end of the exhibit hall is the chapel room that features an antique organ that visitors can crank and play tunes.



The antique Moon Buggy was a garage sale purchase. It is signed *Built by the Deppatter Bros., Freeport, Texas*. We added a new wooden seat and a new gas motor. As it rolls (at a walking pace) the seat rocks back and forth!

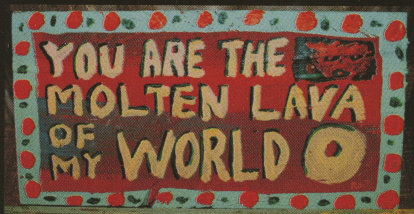


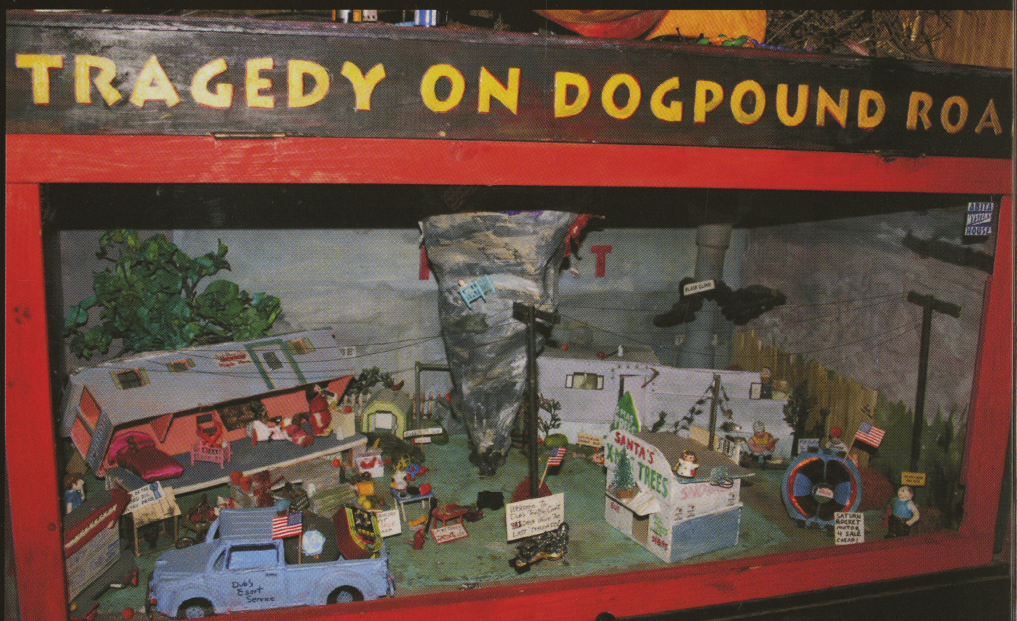
The Creole Cottage (circa 1915) was originally built about a mile away. When the building was moved to this location the roof was removed. During that process, cedar shingles were discovered under the old rusty tin roof. The wooden shingles were



removed and later used on the building that houses Claire Veaux, the resident fortune teller and bait shop manager. The cottage is now a studio where Preble creates many of the exhibits for the Abita Mystery House.

Big Dub's BBQ Heaven
Where Pork Skins Are A Vegetable





Our main attraction is a 30 foot long animated diorama called River Road. Upon seeing this for first time, the words from most visitors is "Oh my!"

River Road is a humorous 3-D cartoon with a lot of push-button switches. The diorama features numerous scenes along a typical old Southern state highway.



New Orleans jazz funeral



'Paint By Number' paintings and old radios



Use a motorcycle to jump over buses



Create a souvenir coin



These two wooden dolls belonged to Preble's mother. She brought them from Switzerland when she first came to the

United States as a child. In the top left of the top photograph is a photo of Preble's mother holding her beloved small wooden doll.



Everyone enjoys the Macaroni Marble Machine – push the button to shoot the ball up and watch it roll down an incredible mountain of Popsicle sticks. The Marble Machine sits inside an old movie theater's neon lit ticket booth.

NOW ON EXHIBIT
THELMA
 THE **32-FOOT ALLIGATOR**



The fishing guide of these bass fishing chickens has two heads

ties!

Claire
Knows
Your
Secret!

CLAIRE VEAUX

Amazing Fortune Teller

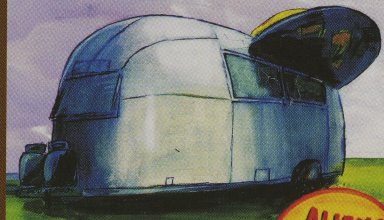
Creole Voodoo Priestess from The Atchafalaya Swamp

Claire
Knows
Your
Future

YES



WRECK of the UFO



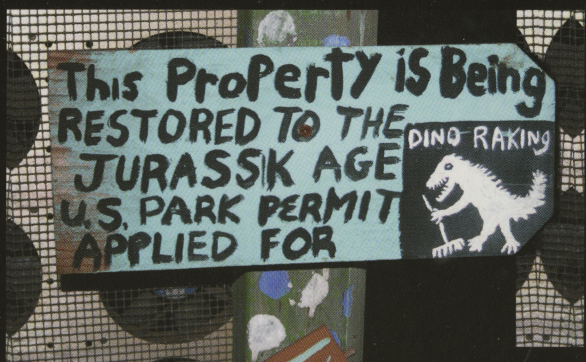
ALIENS
vs
AIRSTREAM



Bottle Wall



Sister Claire's Live Bait Shack





Harnessing the wind



Technical Services Department



The Hot Sauce House



Passion Flower (*Passiflora*)



Part of the House of Shards was built in the 1920's as a barn. It is constructed with barge wood, wood that was originally used to build barges that floated down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. The barges were then disassembled and sold as building materials. The barn originally had a dirt floor. At some point a second room was added along with a small bathroom. The exterior was later covered with metal lath and concrete stucco. This stucco is the foundation for the mosaic.

The House of Shards is connected to the museum's exhibit hall via a ramp and walkway. Visitors are allowed to walk around the house to see and photograph the various mosaic patterns. On the exterior wall one will see over 15,000 pieces of ceramic plates, tiles, colored glass, and mirrors. William Preble (look for his "W" on the exterior) and others helped place the shards on the walls. Behind the House of Shards are the Patio of Compassion and the Shed of Revelations.





Darrel the dogigator



Everyone loves goldfish

Preble started painting these signs when someone donated hundreds of short boards cut from a new pine fence. The signature on the sign is ROJ (Revelations of John). Preble coined the phrase *Be Strange Not A Stranger* in 2008.





Edmond the allisapien



Tina, a Louisiana alligator snapping turtle, resides on the premises.



Lacombe Model, oil on canvas 24"x36" 2002



Mardi Gras Mystery, oil on canvas 10"x8" 2007

In 1985, John Preble began his *Camille* series of oil paintings. Camille is no individual person. She is simply a spirit of

the Créole Indians that inhabit the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana near New Orleans.



EVERY TIME I SEE AN ADULT ON A BICYCLE
I NO LONGER DESPAIR FOR THE FUTURE
• OF THE HUMAN RACE - H.G. WELLS



Creating a woodcut print involves carefully carving the top of a flat wood slab. An image is carved into the surface of the wood. The printed areas are those original wood surfaces that are not cut away; the non-printing parts are the areas cut (gouged) with a chisel - these are the white (unprinted) areas.

Preble's prints celebrate the woodcut style. He has created numerous prints including an "ABC" series, interesting quotations, nursery rhymes, famous musicians, and wildlife.



Abita Springs



Once a Choctaw Indian village, Abita Springs is now widely recognized for its attractive historic district, shaded sidewalks, friendly restaurants, antique shops, and art galleries.

Bike riders, walkers, joggers, skaters, and horse back riders make use of the popular Tammany Trace that passes through the center of this small town.

Abita Springs is north of Lake Ponchartrain and less than an hour's drive from the New Orleans French Quarter.

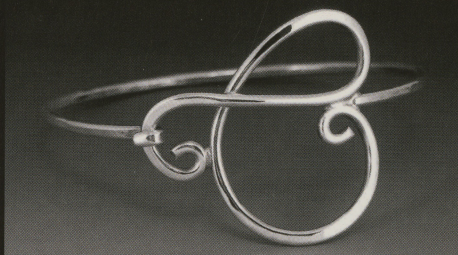
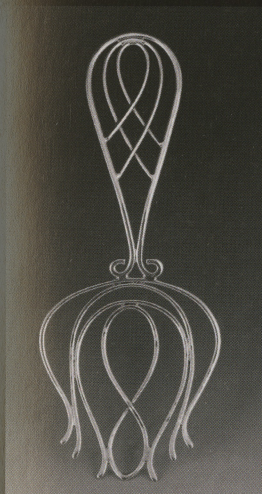
Abita's biggest annual event is the Whole Town Garage Sale at the end of March. This event was founded by Preble years before he opened the Mystery House.

Left: This oil painting of the Abita pavilion was painted by Preble, it is now a popular poster sold in the gift shop.

Below: The O'Brien-Preble home is a few blocks from the Mystery House.



Jewelry



The UCM Museum sells Ann O'Brien jewelry. O'Brien was Preble's wife and the mother of his two sons. After O'Brien's death in 2006, Nancy Ashworth, O'Brien's long time assistant kept the jewelry studio open with her own assistants. O'Brien made numerous drawings and production notes; these notes have allowed the studio to continue to create those designs. O'Brien began making jewelry in the late 1960's. The studio's website is www.aobjewelry.com.



A flying saucer crashed into our mobile home while we were parked next to an abandoned gold mine!

"My son Andrew was 12 years old when he suggested we name it the *You-See-Em Museum*? Using the initials UCM made it more fun for me. After a few years in operation I decided that a better name for my enterprise would be the *Abita Mystery House*. What is the mystery? I am still looking for it!

This souvenir booklet was printed during our 14th year – 14 years of a hobby out of control. When I first opened I thought that I had completed about eighty percent of what I imagined the Mystery House should be. Today I think I have eighty percent more to do! It never ends. Now people bring or send me things for the museum all the time. The place is growing everyday." J. Preble



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The Abita Mystery House was created with no government grants. It is not a non-profit organization or a tax-exempt business. This attraction is a declaration of family enterprise actualized by hard work, independence, persistence and dreams. © 2011 John Preble